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My only quarrels with Koureas’s book concern the style and mode of the argumentation. The text is chock full of ‘this chapter argues’, ‘I will argue’ (three such phrases, for example, are contained in two short paragraphs on p. 50). These interjections are not only distracting, they also indicate that the author doesn’t always have his admittedly complex arguments fully under control. The second problem has to do with the how in the text (not necessarily in his thinking) Koureas deploys some of the more conceptual works he uses to frame his arguments. Rather than use theoretical formulations to focus his questions and exposition of specific materials, – e.g. the various monuments, the collections of war objects, memoirs, etc. – he often invokes or quotes them at the end of his concrete analysis and thereby elevates the discussion to a level of abstraction that is neither useful nor particularly illuminating. His discussion of military training provides an example. He concludes by examining the memoirs of V. Garratt, a working-class veteran of the war.

Two competing masculinities emerge in this context: the working-class masculinity that Garratt felt was knocked out of him on the training grounds and the masculinity imposed by military training. This training, according to Garratt, was designed to ‘wring all the finer qualities and sensibilities out of the recruits; its aim was to ‘pour in the blood lust and mechanical desire to kill’. Garratt recalls that the instructors used ridicule and insult to strike at ‘the most vulnerable part of a man’s nature’. The experience of standing to attention was not only physically exhausting, but also designed to humiliate and demean the soldier. Joan Scott has argued that experience interrogates the process by which subjects are created. As such, the experience of the soldiers who underwent training underpins their subjectivity, which in turn refuses identification with the figure of the ‘picturesque soldier’ (pp. 86–7) The last two sentences in this paragraph are simply superfluous and rather than deepen Koureas’s analysis deflect from it.

These caveats aside, *Memory, Masculinity and National Identity in British Visual Culture, 1914–1930: A Study of ‘Unconquerable Manhood’* is a difficult, though very illuminating, book that will interest anyone working on issues of memory, of the mechanisms and conflicts involved in fostering cultural memory, and of war masculinity as well as the specific problems posed by memory and masculinity in Britain following the First World War.

*Re-envisioning the Chinese Revolution: The Politics and Poetics of Collective Memories in Reform China*

Ching Kwan Lee and Guobing Yang (eds)
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In recent years, there has been a rise of interest among scholars of Anglo-American institutions in collective memory of China. Previous research includes *The Age of Wild*
Ghosts: Memory, Violence, and Place in Southwest China (2001) by Erik Mueggler; and Illuminations from the Past: Trauma, Memory, and History in Modern China (2004) by Ban Wang. China’s economic reform and the follow-up social transformations after the Cultural Revolution have developed and reshaped people’s memories of their revolutionary experiences. Re-envisioning the Chinese Revolution: The Politics and Poetics of Collective Memories in Reform China is a collected volume that uses an interdisciplinary language of collective memory to explore how Chinese people view China’s revolutionary past in the 20th century.

This volume is primarily organized into two parts. The first, based on oral history analysis, consists of six case studies of autobiographical narratives from rural subordinate people and village leaders to low-level cadres and urban workers, presenting a systemic overview of how personal lives in China’s revolutionary past are remembered by ordinary people. The authors suggest that individual narratives vary according to narrators’ particular political and social positions. As shown by Kimberly Manning, for instance, peasant women’s memories of the Collectivization and the Great Leap Forward movement are diversified depending on whether their families had Communist Party members. Whereas women peasants belonging to ‘party families’ recall this period by emphasizing increased opportunities for young women to access free love and marriage, ordinary rural women emphasize their negative experiences of being abused by cadres, even including female cadres. In short, the first part of this book is concerned with the relationship between political power and memory, namely how people’s narratives about the past are connected to and shaped by given political contexts.

The second part focuses primarily on memories represented through cultural forms. The editors argue that the construction of collective memories of the Chinese revolution is not only a political process, but also a cultural process (p. 11). The articulation of memory, as shown by the authors, is constrained by the employment of cultural tools, such as films, photos, exhibitions, letters and the internet. Consistent with the first part, articles in the second part demonstrate that the construction of collective memories of China’s revolutionary past is a contested terrain for different mnemonic constituencies. David Davies, for example, illustrates a dilemma encountered by the organizer of an exhibition, that displays photos about *zhiqing*’s (educated youths’) deprived lives in the Cultural Revolution. This exhibition is both strictly censored by the government, and harshly criticized by these *zhiqing* for its conformity to official taste and discourse. Moreover, Guobin Yang’s study reveals that the internet has enabled alternative narratives and offered more freedom of expression about the Cultural Revolution. For example, Jiang Qing, who is officially characterized and condemned as a betrayer of the country, has been sacralized in online communities.

Articles in this volume address a central issue of collective memory studies: whether the past is malleable or durable. The malleability paradigm sees the past as a present social construction, whereas the durability paradigm believes that the past shapes our understanding of the present. For instance, Gail Hershatter emphasizes the durability of the past by arguing that rural Chinese women’s narrative of their past ‘highlights the circumstances under which collective memory is created, narrated, and inflected by older, powerful, temporally jumbled cultural tropes’ (p. 72). In contrast, Ching Kwan
Lee contends that current conditions do not determine Chinese workers’ memory of socialism. ‘[W]orkers who feel secure in their lives under Reform are as likely to be nostalgic about the socialist era as those who experience deterioration’ (p. 158).

Nevertheless, this volume draws sharp distinction between official memory and collective memory, focusing on counter-narratives as if they are independent from the official construction of the past. As stated in the introduction, ‘[c]ollective memories are distinct from official history in that they are reconstructions from below by people living through history’ (p. 3). This standpoint confines the definition of collective memory, ignoring the importance of political culture in shaping people’s mnemonic and other social practices in contemporary China. In fact, the only article that focuses on official narratives is Denton’s study of four official museums about the War of Resistance Against Japan.

Furthermore, collective memory is defined by the editors as a ‘vision of the collectively experienced past’ (p. 3). However, scholars of the West have been carefully to say that collective memories are not necessarily commonly shared. In other words, collective memories are not collected memories. This terminological misinterpretation may derive from the problematic translation of ‘collective’ in Chinese – jiti – which refers to a group or community in the present, with few historical characteristics.

In spite of these limitations, this volume is a milestone for collective memory studies of China. It is remarkable not only for the wide range of perspectives, but also for the in-depth analysis and interpretations. This book establishes a paradigmatic connection with, and expands the scope of the enterprise of, collective memory studies in the scholarship of the West.

References